



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



“Let the dead bury the dead. “

Vincent Van Gogh's The Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt) (1889-1890) courtesy of Wikimedia



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.
Accept my memory,
my understanding,
And my entire will.
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.
I return it to you,
that it may be governed by your will.
Give me only your grace
and the gift of loving you,
And I will be rich enough;
I will ask for nothing more.
Amen.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

© Mary Birmingham,
2011. All rights reserved.

Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's readings are concerned with discipleship—the radical call of discipleship. We are warned of the rigors of living according to the principles of radical discipleship. It is not an easy path, but it is the path every believer must walk.
- ▶ The only way we can be faithful to our calling is by offering our lives in obedience and submission to God's will.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading: 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21

- ▶ Elisha succeeded Elijah as prophet.
- ▶ Today's reading describes a rite of investiture. Elijah was passing the mantle of prophetic ministry over to Elisha.
- ▶ Remnants of this ancient ritual can be seen today in the stole of the deacon, the chasuble and the habit of religious life.
- ▶ In order to appreciate the Elisha and Elijah account one must understand events leading up to it.
- ▶ Elijah had escaped capture by the royal court.
- ▶ Elijah lodged his complaint with God on Mount Horeb. God spoke to him in the absolute silence he experienced.
- ▶ Elijah complained to God that the people had had an adulterous love affair with Baal. The people's worship of false gods placed God's prophets at risk. Elijah felt abandoned and alone. He felt his life was in danger and threatened to leave active prophetic ministry.
- ▶ God answered Elijah by appointing the prophet Elisha to succeed him.
- ▶ God commissioned Elijah to undertake a new mission. He was not to bask in the luxury of self pity, but was to take up arms—to take action—to join forces with Jesu and overthrow the Omri dynasty.
- ▶ Elijah was to take an active role in the overthrow of Syria and Israel. He failed to accomplish that goal, but later Elisha would accomplish what Elijah was unable to do.
- ▶ The revolution that Elisha would cause in Israel eventually led to the death of many Israelites but would result in creating a faithful remnant of God's chosen people.
- ▶ Those who worshipped Baal would not survive. When Elijah complained that he was all alone in these efforts, God reminded him of the seven thousand faithful remnants who were in his corner.
- ▶ Elisha spearheaded a revitalized prophetic movement that would call the people to repentance, holiness and return to the God of Israel.

- ▶ The prophets called upon the covenant that was forged with Moses and made it present in their lives and their situation. The sinful, idolatrous people were challenged to return to the covenant the jealous God of Israel forged with his people.
- ▶ Today's reading invests Elisha for active prophetic ministry. The handing over of the cloak was a symbol of the new role. "The throwing of the cloak, the normal attire of a prophet, symbolized either ownership and responsibility or investiture and initiation of a successor".¹
- ▶ The gift of the cloak was a sign of ownership, responsibility and protection. The cloak communicated friendship and unity. A bond was forged between the parties.
- ▶ As a ritual of investiture the person receiving it was considered heir to the same power as the giver. When Elijah was assumed into heaven, Elisha was able to accomplish Elijah's miracle (2 Kings 2:8, 13-14).
- ▶ Since Elisha owned several oxen for plowing when most people only owned one, it is obvious that he was a rich man.
- ▶ This son of a wealthy family asked if he could say farewell to his family before setting out on his prophetic mission. Elijah seems to respond with a biting retort. However, some commentators suggest that it could simply have been Elijah's way to say, "Go do it, I'll not stop you."
- ▶ A sign of Elisha's new commitment he slaughtered an oxen. God had elected Elisha.
- ▶ He was ready and eager to forge headlong into his new vocation, detaching himself from his former life as he followed God's call.
- ▶ Elijah returned to his former life and Elisha took up where Elijah left off.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What does the Elijah and Elisha episode have to teach us today in this time and in this culture?
- ▶ Since we are all baptized prophets who are called to proclaim God's word through our words and our actions, what does Elijah teach us about the prophetic life?
- ▶ Consider the times in your life that you have exercised your role as prophet: was it easy or was it difficult? What did it accomplish?

¹Sanchez, Patricia. *The Word We Celebrate* (Kansas City, Sheed and Ward.) 1991) 340.

- ▶ What always happens to prophets?
- ▶ Are you willing to take the cloak and grow more fully in your role as prophet? What obstacles stand in your way?
- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

Second Reading: Galatians 5, 1. 13-18

- ▶ Paul continues his teaching on the Law. He insists that when it comes to the Law, people have a choice. One can either choose to live according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, embrace the Paschal Mystery and thus be saved, or one can lose salvation by rigid observance of the Law.
- ▶ When one attaches oneself to the Law, the implication is hard to overcome. It means that if I am careful to follow God's Law then I can be saved. The onus is on the individual rather than on the free gift of God.
- ▶ Paul insists that freedom from the Law is not a license to disobey the Law. One can do no less than live according to its imperatives. However, when one believes his or her salvation is guaranteed by faithful adherence to the Law they are sorely mistaken.
- ▶ The Law that governs one's response to God is the law of love.
- ▶ Freedom from the Law means that one is free to live for others, not one's self.
- ▶ We are led by Christ's Holy Spirit to choose the life that was forged for us by the sacrifice of Christ.
- ▶ However, even though the Spirit leads and guides, we are not always attentive to the Spirit's prompting.
- ▶ We sin and live according to the flesh. The flesh is a symbol of and reference to humanity's rejection of God.
- ▶ However, we are given strength through the power of the Spirit to resist the temptation of the flesh. We do not always make the right choices and thus we are sinners. The strength of the Spirit is always there to lead us if we are willing to cooperate with the grace that is given.
- ▶ The Spirit can strengthen us against temptation. The Law does not have the power to similarly strengthen us.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Regardless of whether we would use the same language used in this reading, the belief that if we follow all the rules, we deserve heaven, is alive and well today. Have you ever had the experience of catching yourself saying to yourself: "Why is

this happening to me? I do everything I am supposed to do, I follow all the rules?” What is Paul trying to teach us about this way of thinking?

- ▶ What is the bottom line for Paul? What is he trying to exhort his community to embrace? Is he telling them that the Law is unnecessary or that they do not have to follow the commandments? What are the implications of what he is trying to teach the Galatians?
- ▶ How is this Good News for us today?

Gospel: Luke 9, 51-62

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Jesus set his eyes toward Jerusalem and teaches disciples and would-be disciples about discipleship.
- ▶ Jesus taught his disciples about kingdom living as he made the journey to Jerusalem with them.
- ▶ They were forged into the disciples they were called to be by walking the journey with him. They were not only taught about the kingdom, they were given his power and authority to teach, preach and heal.
- ▶ One must never forget that Jerusalem is the journey. We all know what happened in Jerusalem.
- ▶ As their journey nears their destination talk of Jesus suffering and death increases.
- ▶ Jesus has no illusions. Pain and suffering await him as it does all disciples.
- ▶ Jesus must prepare them for the road ahead. Their task is arduous—the demands of discipleship are strenuous.
- ▶ Christians can expect rejection. Jesus wants his disciples to be fully aware of what they could expect as they go forth taking his mission to the world.
- ▶ James and John want to visit fire upon the Samaritan town that rejected them. They wanted to do what Elijah had done.
- ▶ Here Jesus radically differs from his Old Testament counterpart. He presents his catechism of non-violence to his disciples. Jesus rejects their violence. Jesus taught them they must love their enemies. They must turn the other cheek. Only God has the right to issue judgment against a city.
- ▶ Luke wants his readers to understand that Jesus is the Greatest Prophet—the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophets.
- ▶ He too was lifted up as Elijah was lifted up.
- ▶ Jesus appointed successors to his mission just as Elijah and Moses once did.
- ▶ Jesus went to Jerusalem to prophecy against Israel. As he journeyed he preached

the new kingdom. Some accepted his teaching and became disciples, others outright rejected him.

- ▶ One need ask how Jesus could ever ask someone not to fulfill their biblical responsibility to bury their deceased family members. It borders on cruelty.
- ▶ Jesus is simply driving home his most important principle. Nothing should ever get in the way of proclaiming and promoting the reign of God.
- ▶ In order to be a disciple detachment is required. When one is attached to worldly possession and family relationships, they are distracted from the work of building the kingdom. Nothing should ever get in the way of so great a work.
- ▶ Jesus point is that disciples are called to intimate union with him. Period. Nothing is to get in the way of that union.
- ▶ We are called to trust and offer our lives and our wills to Christ and his mission.
- ▶ The ultimate question is, “are we up for the task? Are we willing to completely give our lives over to Christ and his mission?”



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ What is Jesus' primary message for his disciples? To what is Jesus calling his disciples? There is an inherent call to conversion—what is it?
- ▶ What does Jesus want to teach his disciples? Why all the urgency?
- ▶ Is there similar urgency for us? If so, why?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?
- ▶ Is this Gospel relevant today as it was then? If so, why? What is Jesus preparing us for today?
- ▶ What would be your response if you were on that same journey with Jesus and he told you that what he was asking you to do would require that you be rejected and endure persecution and suffering? How would you respond? In what way would you similarly be rejected today or know similar persecution and suffering?
- ▶ What does Jesus' message of non-violence have to teach us? Why is that an important message in our world today?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflecting on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. So many times over the years I have had the same complaint with God that we heard Elijah making. Why am I standing alone in this? I am afraid. Where are you? So many times over the years I too experienced the silence of God and in that silence God answered.

Years ago I was part of a small group of parishioners in a former parish. The parish I was involved in was experiencing a very difficult time. There was much division. At times it seemed as though the Hatfield's and the McCoy's were in charge of the parish rather than the people of God.

Our role was to try and remain as detached from the ugliness as we could. Yet the temptation to gossip and get involved in the arguments was more than we could resist at times. People on both sides of the camp were being demonized by the other side of the camp. Our very small group was accused of plotting the dismissal of a parish employee. The charges were absolutely false and had nothing to do with us. Perception is always the reality in situations, so there was nothing we could do to convince the folks that we were innocent of the charges.

I can remember feeling like Elijah must have felt. We truly believed we had done nothing to cause the stir that was leveled against us. I can remember the feeling of isolation. There were so few of us and the other group had far more participants than our small group.

We prayed like Elijah prayed. We challenged ourselves to take the high road and resist the temptation to gossip about the others. At times we were very successful at other times, not so much.

God was faithful in our parish crisis. The situation was dealt with and those of us left behind were faced with having to pick up the pieces and forge a new life—to do the work of reconciliation. God slowly led us where we needed to go.

Like the advent of Elisha we forged a new path. God was doing something new and was inviting us to rebuild. The parish came back even stronger. Those who chose to hang on to animosities either quietly rested in their resentments or left the parish.

God is the rebuilders of fortunes if we allow him to lead us. There were days we did an exemplary job. There were days we went our own way. In the end God had God's way.

#2. Paul is trying to teach us that indeed the Law cannot save us, but if we embrace the Paschal Mystery of Christ and commit to participate in the cycle of death and resurrection in our daily lives, we can do no less than live for others and by extension automatically live according to the Law. Our response for so great a gift is love. Love manifests itself in not only living the Law but going beyond the Law.

I have certainly been known on occasion to grumble to the Lord about what is going on in my life. I, like St. Theresa, remind him, "If this is how you treat your friends it is no wonder you have so few." Inherent in that comical retort is the belief that difficult, painful, sorrow-filled things should not happen to believers. Somehow we should be exempt due to our great discipleship efforts.

I remember complaining to someone once about the ongoing mental illness of my child. My

complaint, “Why me?” met the response, “Why not you? The rain falls on the just and the unjust. We are all subject to the travails of life. Commitment to Jesus Christ does not spare us.”

I have learned, however, that my faith in Christ strengthens me to endure. It offers me hope for a better future. It provides solace in the midst of despair and it reminds me that there are others who similarly suffer and who need my support and advocacy. That is why it is OK if I am similarly afflicted. Jesus walked with us to become part of the human condition. Had he not it would have been very easy for us to say to him, “It’s easy for you to tell us to have hope and believe. You don’t know what it is like to walk in our shoes!” The truth is he has walked in our shoes. He does know.

When we are challenged to walk the road of death and resurrection with our brothers and sisters, we go as sojourners who understand the implications of pain and sorrow because we have been down that road before them.

No we are not saved by the Law. We are saved only through Jesus Christ crucified and raised. For such great love I am called to respond in love. I am called to go beyond the Law’s imperative. Such is the call of radical discipleship.

#3. Jesus is ultimately calling his disciples into intimate union with him—to understand that he is their Source. The Christian mission cannot go forth on human steam alone. It requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It requires that we know our Source—that we forge an intimate relationship with Christ who knows us best and loves us most.

Each of us is gifted for mission. I have had the privilege of traveling throughout this country to experience the work of God in parishes all over the United States. I am humbled by the faithful work of God’s people. Every time I go somewhere I come home thinking that if only I could be as zealous and as faith-filled as the people to whom I just ministered I would truly be a loving, effective faithful minister of the Gospel. We are so blessed to have so many committed disciples to do the work of Jesus Christ in the world. I learn so much from them!

I know this work is demanding. There are times I want to stop and just enjoy my family. There are times, like Elijah, that I want to throw in the towel and say, “Enough!” Yet every time I am thus tempted, the Spirit of God gently taps me on the shoulder and says, “No basking in self-pity! It is time to get moving again. I have another job for you to do!” Up and away I go. I am always amazed at how thoroughly touched and moved I am by God’s work in the world. I am very thankful that the Spirit does not give up on me and refuses to listen when I say, “Enough!”



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Kingdom of God
Evangelization
Sacrament of Orders
Faith

Prayer
Salvation
Ecumenism
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus came to establish the kingdom. Today he tells his disciples the implications of kingdom living. He reminds them that the road is not easy. He reminds them that they too will be rejected. Those who are called to establish the reign of God are to follow the example of Jesus. They are to detach from worldly concerns and consider the kingdom of God their top priority. This section of Luke's Gospel focuses on Jesus' mission to establish the reign of God and prepare his disciples for his absence. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

EVANGELIZATION

Jesus prepares his disciples to establish his kingdom after his death. He is teaching them what it means to be a disciple and what will be expected of them. Their primary goal is to preach the Kingdom. Thus, he is teaching them about the importance of EVANGELIZATION. Today our extended session will focus on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

Today Elisha is commissioned for service in God's prophetic mission. Jesus reminds those who would take up the mantle of kingdom ministry that they are to detach from all that would keep them focused on their former life. These themes very naturally invite us to focus on the sacrament of Holy Orders which is a commissioning for ministry in God's service par excellence. Thus today's extended session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS.

FAITH

All the readings are a call to FAITH. No one can go forward to establish the kingdom of God without radical faith in God. No one is able to detach from their worldly possessions in order to promote God's reign without faith. Thus, today we will focus our attention on what the Church teaches about FAITH.

PRAYER

Jesus reminds his disciples that union with him is their top priority. He gives the example throughout Luke's Gospel of what drives his mission—intimacy with his Father. If we are to be in complete union with Jesus then we must develop a consistent prayer life. Today our extended session will focus on PRAYER.

SALVATION

Jesus teaches his disciples about the kingdom he came to establish. He teaches them what they can expect. They now will be the messengers of his salvation. These chapters in Luke's Gospel serve as a catechism on the salvation Jesus came to offer. Today's liturgy invites us to reflect on the great gift of salvation we have been given through God's Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, today our extended session will focus on the mystery of SALVATION.

ECUMENISM

Jesus is preparing his disciples to establish the kingdom of God after his death. We are to continue that mission today. Part of Jesus' mission requires that we join forces with other Christians to work in unity to establish the reign of God. It is thus important that we understand what the Church teaches us about ecumenism—how we approach other non-Catholic religions. Thus, today's extended session will focus on Church teaching regarding ECUMENISM.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.